

Empire of Desires: History and Queer Theory in an Age of Global Affect

(Imperium pożądania. Historia i teoria queer w dobie globalnego afektu)

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STRESZCZENIE: Praca ta stanowi przegląd stanu badań z dziedziny *queer studies* oraz argument na rzecz przywrócenia historycyzmu epistemologicznego do odmiennej analizy teoretycznej, po to, by naświetlić zjawisko globalizacji i transnacionalizmu seksualności. Według autora można to osiągnąć po pierwsze poprzez "wyrzeczenie się" pewnych konstrukcji intelektualnych, takich jak (1) postrzeganie XIX-wiecznego "Wielkiego Przesunięcia Paradygmatów" jako historycznego zastąpienia "aktów" seksualnych przez "tożsamości" seksualne, (2) przekonanie, iż wszelkie tryby czasowości [modes of temporality] proponowane przez teorię *queer* są niespójne i nielinearne, oraz (3) idealistyczne założenie, że to, co zdekonstruuja, zdenormalizują, czy zdenaturalizują teoretycy *queer* będzie w jakiś sposób konceptualnie niepodatne

na ich jednoczesne konstrukcje, normalizacji i naturalizacje. Aby historia mogła posłużyć do przekształcania teorii *queer*, należy jednocześnie "otworzyć" pewne drzwi, np. poprzez (1) wprowadzenie kwestii epistemologicznych z powrotem do prób teoretyzowania odmiennych podmiotowości, (2) częstsze dokonywanie generalizacji na temat zmian i ciągłości [continuities] nie tylko w przestrzeni geograficznej ale i w czasie, (3) bardziej zaangażowane etycznie podejście do imperialistycznego charakteru i konsekwencji krytyki *queer*.

Queer theorists and their interlocutors have in general become increasingly ambivalent about the notion of temporality-from situating it in their work to situating ways of studying it in relation to their work. The past decade or so witnessed a distinct rearrangement in the interplay between history and queer theory: namely, the shift from a preoccupation with the analytic application of identity categories in the 1980s and early 1990s, to a mode of inquiry in which the past is approached via a framework that does not position heterosexuality as the privileged cultural paradigm of human intimacy. Susan McCabe has termed this evolving process of scholarly endeavor "the rise of queer historicism." [2]

This transition unfolded in part as historians and other scholars of

gender and sexuality find the essentialism-versus-social-constructionism debate increasingly parochial. Subsequently, numerous monographs appeared to reorient, at a fundamental level, the ways in which the significance of erotic desire and its related modes of identification could be assessed for different times and places (yet the focus of which still all too often falls within the Euro-American context). Concrete examples of this trajectory can be traced from the publication of David Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* to the appearance of such recent works as Matt Houlbook's *Queer London* and Sharon Marcus's *Between Women*. [3] The evolution of this trajectory, in other words, is marked by a distinct flow of influence from historical considerations to the emergence of queer theory in the beginning,[4] then gradually replaced by a reversed frame of impact-from queer theory to historical scholarship.[5]

Situated in this trajectory, Euro-American lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer historiography has certainly proliferated to the extent that it now occupies a respectable place in the humanities and social sciences. Although this might suggest that what Lisa Duggan has called "the discipline problem"-the strained relationship between queer theory and gay/lesbian history-has disappeared, I believe its legacy is something that we are still living with.[6] Part of the reason that it persists, though admittedly in

a somewhat different guise, has to do with how transnational or global studies has significantly reconfigured the scope of queer studies in recent years. The consequences of this reconfiguration can easily be measured by the growing number of works by scholars who claim queer diasporas, queer post-colonialism, or global queer studies as their area of research specialty.[7]

In a special issue volume of *Social Text* published in 2005, sixteen articles interrogate the limits and potentials of the term "queer," which-through its epistemological and political applicability-unites scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds in perhaps otherwise less compelling ways.

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